

VZCZCXRO6916
PP RUEHDBU
DE RUEHMO #3531/01 2000900
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 190900Z JUL 07
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2195
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHDX/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 003531

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/19/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PBTS](#) [MARR](#) [UNSC](#) [GG](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: ABKHAZIA: RUSSIAN MFA DEFENDS STATEMENT, ASKS FOR
SHAMBA VISIT

REF: STATE 99397

Classified By: PolMinCouns Alice G. Wells. Reason: 1.4 (b, d)

Summary

¶1. (C) We took the Russian MFA to task July 18 for its statement on the UNOMIG report on the March 11 Kodori Gorge attack. MFA officials Chernov and Tarabrin said the statement in no way criticized the USG, claiming its criticism was aimed at press commentary after the State Department statement. Tarabrin, who clearly wrote the statement, openly blamed Georgia for the attack. Chernov made a strong push for an Arria-style UNSC appearance for Abkhaz "FM" Shamba. End Summary.

Lost in Translation

¶2. (C) We called on MFA Abkhazia negotiator Vladislav Chernov July 18 to protest the MFA statement issued the previous day.

Chernov was joined by 4th CIS Department principal deputy director Dmitriy Tarabrin. Chernov had been out with a rheumatic hip, and it became apparent that Tarabrin drafted the statement. The looks of disbelief and consternation that Chernov gave Tarabrin as the latter defended the statement made clear that Chernov had not seen it before, and would at the very least have phrased it less crudely.

¶3. (C) We made the following points: that the statement was unduly defensive, since neither UNOMIG nor the U.S. had accused Russia of attacking Georgia; the criticism of the U.S. statement was misplaced. Russia could have been positive, as the U.S. had been: we all agreed that there had been an attack on Georgian soil, we could all condemn such an attack, and we could all agree that measures such as deployment of monitors should be taken to prevent its repetition.

¶4. (C) Tarabrin maintained the Russian statement was a response to articles that had appeared in the Western and Georgian press, as mentioned in the sentence after quotations from the U.S. statement. It was in no way meant to be a criticism of the U.S. or the U.S. statement. We responded that the Russian statement would not be read that way in Washington. The tone and context would ensure otherwise.

Attack? What Attack?

¶5. (C) Chernov and Tarabrin would not agree that an attack had taken place. The translation of the U.S. statement into Russian, with its directional case endings, could only mean an attack that came from outside Georgia, and that had to be from the territory of Russia. Tarabrin rejected this, and claimed that one could conclude from the UNOMIG report that

Georgia had staged an attack on itself. "Cui bono?" he asked. "Who benefited from this so-called attack?" He read passages from the report, which he said he had gone over ten times, in support of his contention that Russian helicopters could not have been involved, nor any ground forces from outside Georgian-controlled territory.

¶16. (C) We rejected this argumentation and pointed instead to the clear forensic evidence of shells and craters. The UN had concluded that helicopters were involved in the attack as well as ground fire. Tarabrin responded that the helo-fired shell was produced in Russia in 2002 or 2003, but it was of a type that had been sold to many third countries. It could have come from a Georgian helicopter, one of which had been flying in the region and crashed. We pointed out that this was inaccurate; the helicopter had gone down soon after leaving Tbilisi, hundreds of kilometers away. Tarabrin maintained that neither the PKF nor Russian units in the region have night-flying capabilities.

Shamba Must Visit

¶17. (C) Chernov made a push to allow Abkhaz "FM" Sergey Shamba to brief the UNSC in an "Arria-style" forum before the July 23 discussion of the UNSYG's Interim Report on Abkhazia. Such a move is necessary not only for reasons of balance -- since Georgian Permrep Alasania is addressing the Council -- but also to help the Abkhaz get over the idea that the UN is unfair towards them. The U.S. should not abuse its host country privileges by refusing Shamba a visa.

¶18. (C) We responded that the visa is not the issue; when there is FSG consensus there will also be a visa. Our

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understanding was that discussion had been of a "Geneva-style" meeting, not "Arria-style," and that it was to take place after direct talks between Georgians and Abkhaz were resumed.

¶19. (C) Chernov said that he has never agreed to a "Geneva-style" meeting, and the Russian position remains that the Arria-style forum was designed for just such cases. As to dialogue, the Georgians and Abkhaz had agreed to resume the Chuburkhinja quadripartite talks with UNOMIG in the chair. However, the Georgians had appointed as their representative an MVD official named Logua in full knowledge that the Abkhaz considered him a war criminal and would refuse to sit down with him.

¶10. (C) Chernov recognized it is already too late in practice to have Shamba participate in the review of the UNSYG's Interim Report. He asked that the U.S. grant Shamba the opportunity to brief the UNSC via an "Arria-style" forum sometime between now and October. We undertook to transmit his request to Washington.
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